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# THE SECRET WAY

A Comedy in One Act

BY

PRESTON GIBSON

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## THE SECRET WAY.

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### Moral.

*Advise a woman to do as she chooses—if you wish her to choose otherwise.*

*Let human nature take its course, and cater to obstinacy, and nine-times-out-of-ten you will get your way.—P. G.*

PLACE.—*The New Willard Hotel, Washington, D. C.*

SCENE.—*A drawing-room.*

TIME.—*12.45 A. M.*

LIGHTS.—*Out.*

a. m. p., Dec. 3, 1932. Unrecd.

## THE SECRET WAY.

### AT RISE:

*(The stage is in darkness. The door at C. is hastily opened, and THERESA THOMAS enters followed by JAMES JAMES who pushes the electric button. Lights up full. He takes the woman almost roughly in his arms, and kisses her violently. The room is an ordinary parlor with one entrance at C., a curtain door at R. 3 leading into a bedroom. A double brass bed can be seen through the portieres. There is a large sofa at L. 2, a table with three chairs at R. of L. 1, on which is a lamp with a Tiffany glass shade. There is a book-case with glass doors at L. 1. The man is a nice-looking fellow, good height, clean shaven, impetuous, ardent and physical. He is dressed in evening clothes. The woman is a brunette, with large black eyes, full red lips and a yielding figure. She has on a large black hat and an opera cloak. She gently releases herself from his embrace and comes down center.)*

TERRY. I am dreadfully nervous, Jim. I wish we had caught the train! You should have had your own motor instead of trusting to a taxi.

JIM. *(comes down C.)* Don't worry, dear. We are perfectly safe here.

TERRY. You would feel safe anywhere, you haven't a husband.

JIM. No, but I am going to have a wife soon.

TERRY. Here we are in the Willard Hotel. Almost the very first place Ted would search.

JIM. The very last place. He'd think we were in some out of the way hotel, or more likely, on board some train.

TERRY. Do you think he is home by now?

TED. Yes, and probably asleep.

TERRY. Asleep? If I hear he went to sleep quietly the night I ran off with you, I'll never forgive him.

JIM. I haven't my watch; but it must be almost one o'clock.

TERRY. Let's see, we left the supper about quarter past twelve.

JIM. Yes.

TERRY. And missed the twelve thirty, by two minutes.

JIM. Yes. The last train leaving Washington.

TERRY. He must have started for home about 12.30, thinking we would be there a few minutes ahead of him.

JIM. No doubt.

TERRY. By now he is worried—and perhaps realizes I have gone away with you.

JIM. Well?

TERRY. He has a dreadful temper.

JIM. Well?

TERRY. If he should find out we were here. (*Goes quickly into his arms*) It would be terrible. There would be a frightful scene.

JIM. Don't worry. He is not going to find us. The thing for you to do is to get some rest; we shall have to make an early start in the morning.

TERRY. What about my clothes?

JIM. The traveling suit that you gave me, my man has at the Belvedere in Baltimore. When we get to New York you can get enough to last you to Paris. We shall take an apartment and you shall have everything you want. Come take off your hat?

TERRY. (*up and down*) I will, but I'm too nervous to sit down quietly and take up a line of knitting while my husband may be down in the lobby.

JIM. Ridiculous.

TERRY. (*same*) You registered too?

JIM. Not my name.

TERRY. Perhaps Ted knows your handwriting.

JIM. Not well enough for that. My brother is the only one who might.

TERRY. Does he suspect?

JIM. I've told him everything. He knows I love you and he even warned me against running away with you.

TERRY. I don't like him for that——

JIM. You know what I mean.

TERRY. I do think we ought to have a chaperone. I can't go strolling through the world, as if we were married.

JIM. We are only going to stroll to Paris. Then you can get a divorce and we'll marry——

TERRY. You know how I am carried away by impulse.

JIM. Yes.

TERRY. What am I going to do before we get married, in the meanwhile?

JIM. There isn't any meanwhile. We are going at once—the first steamer.

TERRY. I suppose my being here to-night doesn't count.

JIM. It counts for a good deal, Terry.

TERRY. I hope it doesn't turn out a bad deal. I really had no idea of marrying a lot of people.

JIM. Do I look like a crowd? We shall make a very early start, say the six o'clock train.

TERRY. Six o'clock—why go to bed?

JIM. You'll find a few hours rest will——

TERRY. Rest—rest? I never expect to rest again. Is my hat on straight?

JIM. Yes. But your nerves?

TERRY. As long as I am going abroad I might just as well give my nerves a fling. I can take a cure.

JIM. Be reasonable. (*goes near her*) Take off your hat. I'll help you with your dress.

(*Starts to unhook her gown. She runs away.*)

TERRY. I told you we needed a chaperone.

JIM. It's getting late.

TERRY. You look worried. Do you think Ted has found out we are here?

JIM. No, but if he has, I don't care—— (*pulls out pistol*) If he interferes with me, I won't stand for it.

TERRY. Put that away, Jim. I am more frightened of it than my husband.

JIM. (*places the pistol on mantel. Goes to her*) Terry—my Terry—all mine. (*he takes both her hands and looks her over from head to foot*) I've always wanted to see more of you.

TERRY. (*flirtatiously*) Men are curious.

JIM. (*gently putting his arm around her and drawing her to him*) I have longed for this ever since my return from Australia, to be alone with you—alone.

(*He holds her close to him and kisses her. The telephone bell rings sharply. They both are startled. He lets go of her. The bell rings again*)

Shall I answer?

TERRY. Yes. It may be something important.

JIM. (*goes to the telephone, picks up receiver*)

Hello!

TERRY. Who is it?

JIM. I don't know.

TERRY. Find out?

JIM. (*hand over mouthpiece*) He wants to know if I am Mr. Henderson!

TERRY. Are you?

JIM. What name did I register? I've forgotten.

TERRY. I'm sure I don't know your name.

JIM. Henderson—that was it. (*speaks into telephone*) Yes, I am Mr. Henderson. My brother wants to see me?

TERRY. He has recognized your handwriting.

JIM. What shall I do?

TERRY. Tell him to come up.

JIM. But——

TERRY. He will have news of Ted. We'd better see him.

JIM. Send him up! (*Hangs up receiver*)

TERRY. I wonder what has happened?

JIM. Nothing.

TERRY. Well, if you think we can run off and nothing happen, you must think an elephant can climb a match.

JIM. He has simply come to offer us any help we may need.

TERRY. I don't need any help. I need clothes, day and night.

JIM. I know.

TERRY. I wish he'd come. I am dreadfully nervous.

JIM. Take it easy. You won't do any good by getting excited.

TERRY. (*going about nervously*) I am perfectly calm. Perfectly calm.

JIM. Yes—but——

(*Knock at door. JIM goes towards it very slowly.*)

TERRY. Hurry, hurry.

JIM. Come in.

(*The door opens and THEODORE THOMAS enters.*)

*He is a very handsome man, about six feet in height, light well trimmed mustache, dressed in evening clothes, black overcoat, open. Silk hat and stick in his left hand, cigar in his right.*

*He blows a puff of smoke out of his mouth as he enters and bows to TERRY. He shuts the door. TERRY exclaims.)*

TERRY. My husband!

JIM. *(starts rapidly toward mantel to get pistol)*

TED. *(to JIM)* Don't get excited. I only dropped in for a few moments to see if you both need anything, and if you are perfectly comfortable.

TERRY. *(amazed)* Well?

*(TED calmly takes off his coat, puts it on chair, hat on top of it, comes down center, seats himself comfortably.)*

TED. Going away?

JIM. Yes.

TED. May I ask where?

JIM. Abroad. I suppose you think you are going to prevent us.

TED. Such an idea never entered my head.

TERRY. He doesn't care.

JIM. I don't know what your scheme is, but you had better take the shoe and leather limited out of this room.

TED. I just want to finish my cigar. You don't mind I'm sure, Terry.

TERRY. No. That is——

TED. Just a few puffs, then I'll be off. *(to JIM)* Sit down. *(JIM stands. To TERRY)* Come be sociable, Terry, now that you are going away with him, I may never see you again.

TERRY. *(sits)* Well?

JIM. *(angrily)* Make it short. I don't want to have to put you out.

TED. You won't have to, what are your plans?

JIM. Terry is tired of you, and she is going to Paris with me.

TED. She will enjoy Paris.

JIM. Divorce proceedings will be instituted at one.

TED. That is quite proper.

JIM. We shall be married.

TED. I understand that is sometimes done in Paris. I think your plans are excellent.

TERRY. You do?

TED. I'm going to help you all I can. You will find her a brick, Jim——

JIM. Yes, I know.

TERRY. You will help us?

TED. Of course. I am fond of Jim, and I love you.

JIM. This won't do——

TED. Now, let's talk the matter over sensibly. There are a great many questions to be decided. The first being we——

JIM. We?

TED. We must protect Terry from scandal.

TERRY. Yes, a scandal is like a guinea pig, it multiplies every twenty-four hours.

TED. Why didn't you tell me you wanted to go away with Jim?

TERRY. I had no idea you would be so complaisant. You couldn't have cared much for me.

JIM. There is no necessity of bringing that up.

TED. My fondness for you is the very reason I am so willing to assist you.

JIM. This is going too far.

TED. First we must consider your being here in this hotel.

JIM. (*loudly and emphatically*) And we are going to stay here——

TERRY. Please don't raise your voice.

JIM. Haven't you finished your cigar?

TED. Almost. Now as regards the divorce. I——

TERRY. Yes.

TED. I shall let you bring the action.

TERRY. Really? Thanks!

TED. You see if I did I would have to name Jim.

JIM. Good Heavens——

TED. I should object to a fake co-respondent.

TERRY. I would never think of such a thing.

JIM. There's time enough for that.

TED. These matters are important, and should be settled now. We should agree on the grounds for divorce.

TERRY. Of course we should.

JIM. Nonsense.

TED. You don't want a counter-suit, do you? I am only trying to facilitate matters for you both——

TERRY. I think its very nice of you to take all this trouble.

TED. If the positions were reversed I'm sure you'd do the same, Terry.

JIM. I'm getting tired of this.

*(Goes toward mantel.)*

TED. Cruelty—that's it.

TERRY. You have always been so kind. No? that wouldn't do.

TED. Desertion.

TERRY. No, that would look as if you threw me over.

TED. I've got it! Drunkenness.

TERRY. *(reprovingly)* Ridiculous!

TED. I don't know what there is left to separate us by law.

JIM. I've got it. Let's say you are a dope fiend.

TERRY. How could you suggest such a thing?

TED. Well, when you decide write me.

TERRY. I don't like any of the ways mentioned.

JIM. *(positively)* We'll find a way. Good-night, Theodore.

TERRY. Don't be rude, Jim.

TED. There's another matter I want to say a word about. *(to TERRY)* Your spending money.

TERRY. That's all gone.

JIM. I shall not allow Terry to accept anything from you.

TED. If I give you an allowance it might be embarrassing, so I will simply turn over to you my Nassau Street property.

TERRY. You are much too good.

TED. Will you accept this as a last favor?

TERRY. I will—as a last favor——

JIM. (*great anger*) It's time you were going.

TERRY. Why do you want to hurry him off when we are having such a nice talk.

TED. We've settled almost everything, servants, divorce and spending money. If you think of anything else before you sail drop me a line, Terry.

TERRY. Thanks.

TED. You're a lucky boy, Jim. She's the best of them all, an ace.

TERRY. Don't——

JIM. I know all about her.

TED. You'll never know all about her. She's simple, yet complex. She's light on the bit, yet she pulls. When you think she is in her fourth speed, she is in the reverse. Like the crab—when you think she is coming toward you, she is backing away. I tell you after she was made they destroyed the pattern.

TERRY. It's been a long time since you talked in this way.

TED. It's been a long time since you've listened.

TERRY. What are you going to do?

TED. I haven't quite made up my mind. But I think I will take a motor trip.

TERRY. Alone?

TED. Perhaps.

TERRY. You are thinking of some one.

TED. No one in particular.

TERRY. Some woman.

TED. Perhaps.

TERRY. Who?

TED. I don't know.

TERRY. You have some one in mind.

TED. Well, I did think perhaps Julie Henry——

TERRY. (*excitedly*) Julie Henry?

TED. A trip through the Berkshires wouldn't be bad at all. Now I think we have settled everything. Good-night, and good-bye, Terry.

(TED is at mantel.)

TERRY. (*starts toward TED*) I'm going home.

JIM. You are not.

TERRY. Why not?

JIM. Because I say so.

TERRY. (*sweeps by him*) You say so! (*snaps her fingers*) They say he who stops and ponders is bossed, well, I don't even hesitate.

JIM. (*works up to a fury*) Wait a minute. I'm not going to stand for this—— (*at mantel*) You're going to stay right here with me. I've gone too far to turn back now. (*picks up pistol from mantel*)

TERRY. What do you mean?

JIM. I mean that half an hour ago, you were just going to take off your hat, when the telephone rang, and he came: I mean that you are going to take off your hat and stay with me.

TED. Terry shall do just as she pleases. Do you want to go or stay, Terry.

TERRY. I am going.

(Starts to the door. TED takes one hurried step towards door.)

JIM. Don't open that door! (*levels pistol at him*) Don't move. I mean business. I'll show you the kind of a man I am.

TERRY. Man?—you call yourself a man? Why there isn't one drop of manhood in your whole makeup. You've mistreated your wife, you've lied

to me! Now you stand there threatening to shoot your best friend:—and you call yourself a man?

JIM. You must stay here with me.

TERRY. I wish to God I had never been born!

JIM. (*to TED*) I'll give you ten to clear out or you will get a number at the morgue.

TERRY. Oh! You beast——

JIM. One—two——

TED. Keep your nerve, Terry, you are not going to stay and I am not going to the morgue.

JIM. Three—four——

TERRY. For heaven's sake, don't do anything rash, (*begins to take off her hat*) I'll stay! Don't shoot.

(*TED gets his hat and coat*)

JIM. Five—six—seven.

TERRY. For God's sake go.

JIM. Eight—nine——

TED. Keep your nerve, Terry, keep your nerve.

JIM. Ten!

(*TED who is by the door presses button and turns out lights, stage in total darkness. A shot is heard. TERRY screams once. The struggle of the two men is heard in the dark, a chair overturns—JIM'S voice is heard.*)

JIM. You're breaking my arm.

(*A body is heard to fall, then the center door is opened and closed with a bang—TERRY presses button lights up—stage clear except for JIM who is on the floor at R. His left arm badly wrenched, he is hidden by the table, she does not see him, she gets her cloak and starts up C., when she gets near door JIM raises himself and shows revolver.*)

JIM. Wait a minute! (*she stops*) Come here, sit down! (*she comes down and sits at L. of table*)

JIM. Well, he's gone—alive too.

TERRY. It was no fault of yours.

JIM. This is Hell!

TERRY. I am sure Hell is not as bad as this.

JIM. Well, what are you going to do?

TERRY. (*motions to pistol*) Just as you say as long as you have that.

JIM. Without it?

TERRY. I'm going home and beg Ted to forgive me.

JIM. Then it's all up with me?

TERRY. When you give that up, you give me up.

JIM. Everything would have been been all right if he hadn't come.

TERRY. How thankful I am he did—else I should have found you out too late.

JIM. You think I am no good.

TERRY. You are the best example of that expression I've ever seen.

JIM. Then you're not going away with me?

TERRY. No.

JIM. If he won't take you back?

TERRY. What is that to you?

JIM. Come, we can't sit here all night, it's two o'clock. You'd better go to bed.

TERRY. I couldn't sleep.

JIM. I suppose he has gone to get a revolver when he comes back one of us will be carried out.

TERRY. He isn't that kind. He is too sensible.  
(*pause, silence*)

JIM. Sensible! I'm a pretty sensible fellow, Terry. Yet I would have killed him just now—women like you don't realize the effect they have upon men like me. It's like putting two matches together, Terry, pouf—they light—you and I are alike in this way—you know there is nothing more quickly aroused or more easily subdued than passion. It goads us to great wrongs.

(*Puts pistol in his pocket, gets hat and coat.*)

TERRY. Where are you going?

JIM. Back to Australia. You'd better go home.

*(Exit JIM, closing door after him.)*

TERRY. *(sits looking straight ahead of her)*  
Shall I go home? What will Ted do. What will he say? *(TED enters from bedroom and comes and puts his arms around her)*

TED. That you and I will start on the motor trip to-morrow.

TERRY. *(in his arms)* Ted!

CURTAIN.

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